

# I. INTRODUCTION



## *System Plan Introduction*

***A. The Mission of the San Antonio Parks and Recreation Department is to develop and maintain a balanced, safe, and easily accessible system of exceptional parks, recreational facilities and programs, as well as promote and maintain world-class facilities to further the City's prominence as a major City and visitor destination.***

### **B. A. PURPOSE**

This 2005 update of the San Antonio Parks and Recreation System Strategic Plan is intended to provide guidance on future decisions concerning operations, capital improvement needs, and programs. As with any function of local government, the ability to plan for the short and long term is critical to meeting community needs. At no time in the City's history has the need for organized, citizen-involved planning been so vital. The public continues to be concerned about its quality of life and expects efficient utilization of funds. These are issues that are constantly being influenced by urban growth pressures, changing demographics, dwindling natural resources, and competing financial demands.

The City of San Antonio adopted the most recent predecessor to this document in 1981. (There was also a master plan document adopted in 1964.) That document was limited to parks acquisition and development needs. It did not provide a comprehensive view of the many factors that impact the parks and recreation system including community demographics, integration of recreation programming, security, and public/private partnerships. More importantly, the plan had not been updated on an ongoing basis and had never been consistently utilized as a public planning document.

The Parks and Recreation System Plan, adopted in 1999, articulated a five year comprehensive view in a document that was used repeatedly for capital improvement program project identification and program prioritization. Since 1999, the Department has adhered to the commitment that the Plan be utilized and updated regularly, and thus continues to serve as a guide to future planning decisions for facilities, operations, and programming.

The Parks and Recreation System Strategic Plan 2005-2015 will continue to fully support the goals and objectives stated in the City of San Antonio's Master Plan Policies adopted in 1997, especially related to Neighborhoods and Urban Design sections. Recommendations stated in the Plan reflect not only the intent of the Master Plan Policies, but other ordinances and processes adopted by the City of San Antonio, including the annual operating budget. These include the Neighborhood Planning Process, the Unified Development Code (UDC), the Open Space Plan, the Drainage Regulations Ordinance and the Tree Preservation Ordinance.

On a state-wide planning level, as part of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's local parks grant program, a process was initiated in 1994 that directs local governmental agencies to complete parks system plans in order to receive State grants. This has led to the completion of such plans by many Texas municipalities. The State of Texas also commissioned a study in 1998 to evaluate the overall parks system in Texas, including municipal, county, state and federal facilities. The San Antonio Parks and Recreation System Strategic Plan, while tailored to our specific community needs, will support this and other statewide efforts to improve the integrated parks system in the region and throughout Texas.

The City of San Antonio is recognized as one of the most unique and fastest growing communities in the nation, ranking as the eighth largest city in the nation in 2005. Among Texas municipalities, San Antonio ranks second in population with an estimated 1,282,800 (2005 estimate) residents, and second in land area with 512 square miles. New businesses and residents are attracted by San Antonio's central location, proximity to the Texas Hill Country and Mexico, climate, cultural diversity, and economic development opportunities. As a result, since the Parks and Recreation System Plan was adopted in 1999, the city has grown by 15%, an increase of over 167,200 residents in five years.

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Not only has the population increased, but its composition has changed. Today, based on ongoing public input, the needs and expectations of residents regarding San Antonio's parks and recreation facilities and programs are definitely different than in 1981, and even different than in 1999. The City faces an increasingly complex challenge to assure that these varied expectations and needs are met.

San Antonio possesses a nationally recognized array of unique facilities that distinguishes its parks and recreation system from others in the country. Residents and visitors alike can enjoy world famous tourist attractions such as the RiverWalk, La Villita, Hemisfair Park/Tower of Americas, and Market Square; historic properties such as San Pedro Springs Park, Brackenridge Park, the Spanish Governor's Palace, and the Historic Eastside Cemeteries; and special and unique facilities such as the Botanical Gardens and Friedrich Nature Park, to name only a few. Golfers can play six fine courses, among them historic Brackenridge and nationally-recognized Cedar Creek. The After School Challenge, Kidquest, and Roving Leader programs are distinguished both state-wide and nationally as unique solutions to community needs.

In spite of its many and diverse park and recreation assets, the City must look to the future and assess how it will meet future needs. The Parks and Recreation System Strategic Plan is a document to address the needs of users in this era of accelerating growth, changing demographics, and diverse citizen needs. The plan inventories existing parks and recreation system facilities and programs, assesses community needs, and summarizes priorities for the coming ten years. As a functional companion to the City of San Antonio's Master Plan Policies, the San Antonio Parks and Recreation System Strategic Plan will guide staff, City leaders, and citizens as they make decisions on future development of facilities and programs. The plan will also assist the Parks and Recreation Department in competing for public and private funding to realize the goals, objectives, and recommendations of the plan.

The purpose of the San Antonio Parks and Recreation System Strategic Plan is to:

1. Update the 1999 Parks and Recreation System Plan by evaluating the Goals and Objectives, Recommendations, and Accomplishments.
2. Continue to develop a coordinated, achievable plan to guide decisions impacting San Antonio's Parks and Recreation System
3. Integrate pertinent City Master Plan policies and adopted ordinances into ongoing parks and recreation system planning (i.e. Neighborhood Planning Process, Drainage Regulations Ordinance, Tree Preservation Ordinance, Open Space Plan; and the Unified Development Code)
4. Integrate information and recommendations from other Departmental studies and reports including the Park Police Performance Review, the National Golf Foundation Report, and the After School and Summer Program Monitoring Standards.
5. Ensure adoption by the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department to support statewide efforts to improve Texas' parks and provide a plan as required for both public and private grants.
6. Integrate the three volumes of the Parks and Recreation System Plan which include this updated Parks and Recreation System Plan (2005), the Planning and Design Guidelines for Creek Based Greenway Parks (2001), and the Land Use Management Planning Guidelines for Natural Areas (2003).

## C. B. SAN ANTONIO PARKS AND RECREATION SYSTEM: 1932 TO 1981

Formal planning of San Antonio's parks and recreation system began in 1932 with the adoption of the City's first Master Plan. Between 1932 and 1981, park planning was addressed in various documents including San Antonio's 1951 Master Plan, the 1964 Master Plan of Parks, the 1980 City Master Plan, the 1980 Urban Park and Recreation Recovery (UPARR) Action Plan, and the Department of Parks and Recreation's 1981 Parks Master Plan.

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The 1964 Master Plan for Parks established that San Antonio had 2,931 acres of park land to serve approximately 600,000 residents. This provided a paltry ratio of 4.89 acres per 1,000 residents. As a result, an ambitious parks development program was recommended to address the tremendous shortfall in parks and open space.

This development program was relatively successful, and 17 years later, the 1981 Parks and Recreation Master Plan reported that park holdings had nearly doubled to 5,988 acres, or 7.6 acres per 1,000 residents. Because other publicly owned park and recreation facilities such as those of the County, State, and other municipalities, were not included in the study, the plan concluded that “the overall deficiency in total public park acres is minimal at this time and is primarily in the neighborhood and community park types.”

## **D. C. SAN ANTONIO PARKS AND RECREATION SYSTEM: 1981 TO 1999**

From the time the 1981 Parks Master Plan was completed until a new plan was adopted in 1999, San Antonio's population grew from 785,400 to 1,115,600. A comparison of the 1980 and 1990 Federal Census indicated that the population's composition changed in the following ways:

- median age increased from 27.1 years to 29.8 years
- racial minorities increased from 62% to 64% of the population
  - persons of Hispanic origin increased from 53.7% to 55.6%
  - persons of Anglo origin decreased from 38.2% to 35.9%
  - persons of African American origin decreased from 7.3% to 7.0%.
  - persons of “other non-Anglo” origin, including Asians, increased from 9% to 1.5%
- median household income rose from \$13,775 to \$26,885
- San Antonio families remaining below the poverty level increased from 16.9% to 18.7%.

Analysis of 1990 census figures and 1997 population estimates showed that San Antonio's growth trend was to continue. The City was physically growing to the north, northeast, and northwest, and all sectors of the city had experienced population increases. These projections raised concerns related to urban sprawl.

To address the population increase in all areas of town, particularly the rapid growth in the northern sector of the city, an ambitious park bond program was adopted by the voters in 1994. The program set aside \$42 million for over sixty park improvement projects. Bond funds were used to rehabilitate overused and neglected inner city parks and to acquire land and develop parks in the faster growing sectors of the city to try to keep pace with growth. This acquisition and development program was extremely successful.

By 1999, the city's park land holdings totaled 7,575 acres, an increase of over 1,500 acres, or 27%, since the 1981 plan was adopted. The increased park acreage resulted from purchases using park bond funds, Federal and State grants, as well as gifts of both Federal surplus and private property. Though significant, these acquisitions did not keep pace with the city's rapid growth and the park acreage ratio per 1,000 residents decreased from the previous planning period to 6.69 acres.

## **E. D. SAN ANTONIO PARKS AND RECREATION SYSTEM: 1999 TO 2005**

Since the 1999 Parks and Recreation System Plan was completed, San Antonio's population has continued to grow. During these years the population has increased from an estimated 1,115,600 in 1999 to an estimated 1,282,800 at the end of 2004, or an increase of 15%. Between 1999 and 2004, the population's composition changed in the following ways:

- median age increased from 29.8 years to 32.4 years
- makeup of race and ethnicity
  - persons of Hispanic origin increased from 55.6% to 58.7%
  - persons of Anglo origin decreased from 35.9% to 31.8%

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- persons of African American origin decreased from 7.0% to 6.8%
  - persons of “other non-Anglo” origin, including persons of Asian origin increased from 1.5% to 2.7%
- median household income rose from \$26,885 to \$36,214

Analysis and assumption of the census data and estimated population figures for 2010 and 2015 show that San Antonio's growth trend will continue, and that the City will continue to grow again to the north, northeast, and the northwest. An influx of rapid growth to the far west and the south of the City is also projected. While most sectors of the City have experienced population increases, the percentage of growth inside Loop 410 increased only slightly, and in at least one instance, decreased slightly. The City park acreage ratio per 1,000 residents increased to 12.35 acres during this time period.

Several ambitious programs were implemented to provide more park land, improve existing parks, and develop new parks since the 1999 Parks and Recreation System Plan was adopted.

1. The 1999 Park Bond Program was approved by the voters in May 1999. The program set aside \$24.2 million for 63 projects for park improvements. Included was the development of many parcels of property bought from the 1994 bond program; continued rehabilitation of existing facilities; and purchase of property in the faster growing sectors of the City. Most of the projects were identified from recommendations in the 1999 Parks and Recreation System Plan.
2. The 2000 (Proposition 3) Sales Tax for Park Land Acquisition Program was approved by voters in May 2000. It provided for a sales tax increase (1/8<sup>th</sup> of a cent) for \$65 million for the purchase and development of property over the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone and in the Salado Creek and Leon Creek watersheds. The City closed on the first acquisition in December 2000. Commercial paper (a debt instrument) was used to accelerate land purchases. For the Edward's aquifer and for the creekways program, \$65 million in tax revenue was collected between October 2000 and July 2004 - \$45 million was for the Edward's program and \$20 million for the creekways program. As of late 2004, the funds for land in the Edward's program are all expensed due to the purchase of over 6,400 acres of land for aquifer protection and land conservation. The creekways program will address purchase of properties in selected contiguous areas of Salado Creek and Leon Creek by 2006. By February 2005, over 200 acres had been purchased and another 2,000 acres are proposed for acquisition to complete this program. Due to funding limitations, all acreage will not be purchased, but a number of sections will be acquired to greatly enhance recreational opportunities along the Leon and Salado Creeks.
3. On June 4, 2001, the Park Dedication Requirement of the newly adopted Unified Development Code (UDC) became effective. For the first time, developers were required to provide either a private or public park, or pay fees-in-lieu of land to the city. In 2004, staff also began the process to amend the UDC as directed by City Council. The process, the ratio of acres per units, and other significant improvements were made to the Park Dedication Requirement making it easier to follow. The changes to the ordinance were adopted on December 9, 2004 and May 12, 2005.
4. 2003 Park Bond Program was approved by the voters in November of 2003. This bond program set aside an additional \$27.2 million for 54 projects that again focused on development, acquisition, and rehabilitation. Again, the 1999 Parks and Recreation System Plan was used as a guide to identify most of the bond projects.
5. The 2005 Proposition 1 Sales Tax for Edward's Aquifer Protection and Proposition 2 Sales Tax for Creekways Parks Development and Expansion was approved by voters in May 2005. This program will provide for a sales tax increase (1/8<sup>th</sup> of a cent) up to \$135 million (\$90 million for Proposition 1 and \$45 million for Proposition 2). Proposition 1 will provide funds to acquire land located over the Edwards Aquifer to protect and preserve the primary source of water for the fast growing San Antonio area. Proposition 2 will provide funds to acquire and develop linear parks along the Leon and Salado Creeks as well as to make improvements to projects on the Medina

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River and the San Antonio River. The tax collection will start in October 2005 with the first funds available in December 2005. This program will complete the work started from Proposition 3 above in the acquisition and development of properties into useable recreational space and to protect life and property near flood-prone areas.

6. The HUD 108 Program application was submitted by the City to the Federal Housing and Urban Development Department in June 2005. This program, allotting a larger amount of CDBG funds at once, allows larger eligible projects to be completed, thus making a more dramatic impact to the community. The Parks and Recreation HUD108 Capital Improvement Projects received a total of \$6,661,000 at 15 separate project sites.

With the help of these voter and/or City Council approved programs, the City's current park land holdings totaled over 16,100 acres, an increase of over 8,500 acres since 1999, largely due to the Sales Tax Initiatives land acquisition efforts. This more than doubled the park system holdings in five years. In spite of these impressive additions to the system and the large investment of funds to develop, maintain, and program parks, new useable park acres and facilities will continue to be a challenge to keep pace with the city's rapid growth.

## **F. E. SAN ANTONIO PARKS AND RECREATION SYSTEM: THE FUTURE OF THE SYSTEM 2005 - 2015**

Population estimates (based on census tract data and growth projections as provided by the Planning Department) project continued growth for San Antonio in the next several years.

<u>2000 (est.)</u>	<u>2005 (est.)</u>	<u>2010 (est.)</u>	<u>2015 (est.)</u>
1,173,400	1,282,800	1,370,400	1,454,100

The population increased by 9.3% between 2000 and 2005 and is expected to increase by another 6.8% over the next five years and another 6.1% by 2015. The City's physical growth will most likely be accompanied by annexation of additional land that will extend the city limits. The City currently occupies 41% (512 square miles) of the land in Bexar County (1,246 square miles), making San Antonio the second largest City in area in Texas with no major barriers to decelerate land expansion.

Recognizing San Antonio's continued growth, the Parks and Recreation System Strategic Plan lists park inventories, currently funded projects, and proposed projects that will increase and improve park and recreation facilities and programs.

## **G. F. CONCLUSION**

It is clear that thoughtful but aggressive planning and promotion of parks and recreational facilities and programs is needed to keep pace with the growth, changing demographics, aging infrastructure, and social needs faced by San Antonio and the surrounding region in the early 21st century. Though the City of San Antonio will assume a leadership role in this effort, adequate and successful planning can only be accomplished through close coordination and cooperation with other public agencies, private organizations, and land development efforts. The San Antonio Parks and Recreation System Strategic Plan recognizes the challenges presented by city growth and complex social needs, and hereby presents the following recommendations to assure that public park and recreation facilities and programs keep pace with the needs of city residents for the coming years.